

# COMMENTARY

## THE WHITE CITIZENS COUNCILS

*Respectable Means for Unrespectable Ends*

DAVID HALBERSTAM

**I**N MARCH of this year Congressman John Bell William told a Greenville, Mississippi, White Citizens Council, "I'd gladly trade all the Negroes in the country for my few good nigger friends." Williams is no political scientist—he flunked out of the University of Mississippi law school in near record time—but on this occasion he did, if inadvertently, define the nature of the Citizens Council movement. Pull aside the curtain of States' Rights and you find, more prominent than anything else, this desire to trade coat-and-tie Negroes for bare-foot ones.

The White Citizens Councils, a loosely connected series of local groups which have arisen throughout the South in protest against the Supreme Court's May 17, 1954 desegregation decision, undoubtedly constitute a very significant political phenomenon. Individually, the Councils can be either powerful or frail, at times the sincere ex-

pression of confusion and desperation, at other times the vehicle for personal frustration. But the single thread connecting all the Councils, strong and weak, is the determination not just to oppose integration in the public schools but to stop or at least postpone it. In most of the Deep South, where hostility to integration is nearly universal, it is this militancy and dedication that make the Council member stand out.

Despite occasional efforts by supporters to build the Councils up into a movement of broad conservatism, their only serious purpose is to fight the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Not only do they contest the NAACP's desegregation suits, but they seek to cancel much else that the Negro has gained over the last half-century by keeping him out of the polling booth. The exact strength of the Councils is difficult to determine: in Mississippi, their cradle, 100,000 members are claimed, but sober estimates would run closer to 55,000. Yet nowhere in the Deep South is their strength to be scoffed at—it is a product of crisis and as more law suits are filed it will mount.

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IN SEPTEMBER the White Citizens Councils showed their latent strength by compelling schools that had been integrated without incident to re-adopt segregation. DAVID HALBERSTAM has been watching the Councils in the South for the last fifteen months, as a reporter for a small daily, and now for the *Nashville Tennessean*. Mr. Halberstam was born in New York in 1934 and is a graduate of Harvard. Articles by him have appeared in the *Reporter*.

**T**HE Council movement has been compared frequently to two earlier organizations that originated in the South, the Ku Klux Klan of Reconstruction times, and the

new Klan that appeared on the scene after World War I. And indeed there are, at least for the moment, certain parallels between the Klans—especially the original one—and the Council movement. The differences are nonetheless crucial. The Councils have an almost self-conscious desire for respectability. They struggle to achieve a constitutionally illegal purpose by “all legal means.” They shun both the Klans’ reputation for violence, and their haberdashery; their members are respectable citizens of the community, the quintessence of the civic luncheon club. At their meetings there is emphasis on speakers from the ministry and the universities.

The original Klan grew out of the turbulence of the post-Civil War South. Southern whites, then politically powerless, donned hood and regalia to move against the “carpet-bag” Negro Union and Loyal Leagues. The membership of the Klan included the backbone of the local community: former Confederate officers, lawyers, and bankers, and it relied primarily on threats—of a “whupping,” a midnight scare session, or a tar-and-feathering—to impose its own notion of peace and order on the semi-anarchy of Reconstruction. But by 1871 the conditions in the South that gave rise to the Klan had largely disappeared and it was disbanded.

The second Klan, which reached its peak in the early 1920's and began to decline after 1926, borrowed its title and uniform from the old Klan, but very little else. Historically, it was a descendant of the Know-Nothings of pre-Civil War times, and believed in an America interpreted by and under the rule of native-born Protestants. Unlike its namesake, the new Klan spread all over the nation, enjoying popularity even in such a mono-racial state as Oregon, and tried its hand at politics. It used the techniques of advertising and salesmanship, hired two professional promoters to popularize and expand it, and gained an estimated top strength of nearly four million.

The second Klan batted on postwar frustration and distrust of foreigners. First and foremost, it was fanatically anti-Catholic, though it was also anti-Negro and anti-

Semitic. It set itself up as a guardian of local morality as well as patriotism, and would don the white hood and go after a man who wasn't supporting his family properly, or who had been drinking too much. Violence was frequent, tar-and-featherings abounded, and there were even lynchings. The movement finally collapsed because of its over-extended membership, its lack of real purpose, and its inability to withstand strong criticism of it from both North and South.

THE White Citizens Council movement today has had to throw off the Klan's stigma and repudiate its legacy. Partly this is so because of the WCC's feeling that not even desegregation justifies violence. But more important is the fact that the economy of the South is fast industrializing: every little town has its industrial development group seeking outside (usually Northern) support, and this is the single most telling factor in the community's attitude toward the future. Whether the town will be prosperous and, frequently, whether it will survive, depends on Northern willingness to build a factory there. “We know that no industrialist is going to move here to escape from labor unrest if there's racial unrest,” one Council member told me.

Like the first Klan, the WCC movement is an expression of the helplessness and frustration that have overcome a whole people. “What else can I do?” one Alabama businessman said. “I can't vote on this, my say means nothing. The legislature, the Congressmen, my neighbors all feel the same way—I've got to do something, and this is it. Isn't this country a democracy any more? I know our Nigras don't want this integration, it's just some agitators.”

The membership likes to believe that the WCC is a democratic organization fighting against “totalitarian” coercion from outside. “The Citizens Council movement,” says a booklet, “is the modern version of the old time town meeting, called to meet any crisis by expressing the will of the people.” “In Nazi Germany,” points out executive secretary R. B. (Tut) Patterson of the Mississippi



Council, "the party controlled the schools and the people submitted and followed a doctrine which violated their consciences, saying they could do nothing because the government had spoken." The doctrine of interposition and the determination to prevent integration by "lawful means" fit very smoothly into the WCC's image of itself.

It is hard to generalize about the actuality of the Councils. In their leadership and their attitude toward the Negro, they vary considerably from community to community, depending on local social, economic, and political factors, but especially on the racial composition of the given area. In some Alabama towns, the Councils did not form until the Autherine Lucy incident, in some towns they formed long before that, as early as 1954, and in some towns they haven't formed yet. In Clifford they formed in the fall of 1955.

CLIFFORD is a town of about 15,000, located in the flatlands of southwestern Alabama. It has two main streets and a parking problem. This is a railroad town (tracks cut right through its middle), and without the railroad its population would never have passed 5,000, and it would have nothing to offer prospective industry today except a tax-free plant and the promise of no labor trouble. In the early autumn, wisps of cotton, blown off the wagons, make a trail of white along the approaching roads, like lint on a huge flannel suit. But Clifford is not a cotton town alone. Its economy is changing—a symbol of this is the Old Watershed Cotton Mill at the southern end of town, vacant since 1951, which the industrial committee hopes will become, with the aid of Northern money, the site of a furniture factory in the coming year.

Clifford, like most other small Southern towns, is always juxtaposing the old and the new. The two government low-rent housing projects stand in stark contrast to the older, staidier homes, with their countless rooms and insoluble heating problems. Ready-to-wear and appliance stores line the main streets, and the old family grocery is

now crowded by supermarkets. The new cars are there, the first sign of prosperity, but they share the streets with the horse-drawn wagons of Negroes transporting junk, cotton, or nothing—where these wagons go, no one knows.

A doctor returning home after four years in the army, a period which saw the addition of a new factory, told me, "This town is changing mighty fast—I don't know everyone any more." It is still a strictly stratified and predominantly church-going community, and much of its social life still centers in the church. But the new managerial class, often former Yankees, is slowly making inroads into Clifford's social life. Already people are talking of a country club.

Clifford's population is about equally divided between whites and blacks and the town has never felt it had a Negro problem like the one they have over in the Mississippi Delta, where Negroes sometimes outnumber whites by two to one or more. Though the treatment of Negroes in Clifford is fairly typical of the South, the townspeople dissociate segregation from prejudice and pride themselves on their good race relations. The last lynching was back in 1912; the last overt racial incident occurred in 1948, when some Northern group (no one remembers which group, although they are pretty sure it was a radical labor one) sent a Negro organizer down. He was quickly ushered onto a train by the white citizenry, and the sheriff (the head usher) coined what has become something of a local slogan: "This is no town for a nigger with a brief-case."

In 1952, when there were rumors that the "separate-but-equal" doctrine was about to be abrogated, Clifford built a new Negro grammar school. Opposition to the project was strong then, but the school is now the pride even of its most outspoken critics. About fifty Negroes vote in the primary, and when someone protests against this, he is told that a token vote keeps the Negroes happy. Nevertheless, sentiment in favor of Negro voting had been growing until it was scotched by the desegregation crisis.

In 1952 a large chemical plant came in,



and Clifford's economy has since picked up considerably. New prosperity has come to the whites, while a Negro, instead of going off to Chicago when he leaves the farm, can sometimes get a job at the chem-works. The job is usually menial, but on occasion it can be quite good, as good or better than ones held by the whites, for once a position is classified as a "nigger job," no white will accept it.

Whereas the Negroes paid 8 per cent of the town's taxes in 1949, they now account for 18 per cent. Though the town can use the added revenue, Clifford people have mixed feelings about the Negro's increased income. For one thing, it is no longer so easy to dismiss him as a ne'er-do-well ("If the nigger could ever hold onto a dime," they used to say, "he'd run the South"); and for another, fifty voting Negroes do not constitute 18 per cent of the electorate. Scattered among the pathetic kindling-wood shacks of Frog Bottom, the colored ghetto, a few new, neat homes now stand which serve as a source of irritation to some whites, and to some Negroes who believe that "I can't get anywhere because I'm black."

SINCE the Supreme Court's public school decision, a certain uneasiness has settled over Clifford. "What are we going to do about it?" they all ask. The bewildered merchant thinks that once Negroes begin mixing with his children, other Negroes will begin opening their own ready-to-wear stores. The small farmer, already in economic trouble, wonders what integration will do to the Negroes who work for him. The politician fears the nascent power of the Negro vote, and worries what effect building of "separate-but-equal" facilities for Negroes will have on Clifford's bonded indebtedness. The local newspaperman fears what may happen to him if he outlines a conservative but realistic program for social change. The worker is uneasy about competing with the Negro for jobs. The very rich, who can afford to send their children to private schools, fear what will happen if integration works; this group, which has so long played

poor white off against poor black, senses the political and economic dangers of the two discovering that they can live together. The men fear for the "purity" of their white women.

And fear breeds rumors which breed more fear:

"They say they are going to appoint a nigger to the Supreme Court, and let him decide all the integration cases."

"A nigger boy tried to get into the high school today and they had a big brawl because he sat next to a white girl." (Actually a Negro delivery boy had carried a package of books to the school; as for the brawl—well—there would have been a brawl had he really attempted to enroll.)

Last fall the Supreme Court followed up its school decision by outlawing segregation in public parks, golf courses, and swimming pools. Clifford has neither a public park nor a public golf course, and no one who took the time to think about it could possibly believe that a local Negro would ever try to go swimming in Memorial pool. But Clifford took the new decision as a threat.

After conferring with the city attorney, the mayor declared, "By God, no nigger is going to swim in Memorial pool as long as I'm mayor." All the ministers, lawyers, and aldermen of the town were summoned to a meeting; about fourteen showed up.

The mayor called first on Royce Vansett, a veteran alderman and an insurance salesman.

"I wouldn't let the niggers swim in our pool," said Vansett. "I figure any time one of them gets near the pool, we can let some redneck take care of him for us."

Bill Hollingsworth, minister of the Clifford Methodist Church, spoke next. Reverend Bill has been described as a man who had no trouble driving along a three-lane highway but who can hardly stay on the road now that it's narrowed, all of a sudden, to two lanes. There are things he would like to say, but it is getting tighter all the time and he can't take the chance. A few years ago he asked the stewards of his church if he could invite some Negroes to sing for the congregation, and everyone



agreed that it was a fine idea. This year he neglected to ask the stewards because he knew they would refuse. He just invited the Negroes. No one complained out loud, but it wasn't like 1952 when people had left the church after services shaking their heads in admiration and saying, "Those niggers sure can sing, can't they?"

When Reverend Hollingsworth addresses the Rotary Club these days he doesn't talk directly about integration or segregation. But he asks the members to imagine what it would be like to be a Negro and have to go around to the back door and always say "sir." At this emergency meeting Hollingsworth challenged Vansett's solution. "If we leave the problem to those who can't handle it, that will only lead to bad feeling and trouble between the races. And remember, if we do that, no matter how much we talk about disapproving of violence, we will be aiding it. I'm not for integration. I'm for decency, and we are going to have to be fair. I can't imagine any Negro wanting to swim in our pool." Slip Beale, an alderman for ten years, leaned over to me and said, loud enough for most people to hear, "I thought the niggers had their own pool." Royce Vansett said they did, the Susquitchie River, and everyone laughed.

Most of the people at the meeting agreed with Bill Hollingsworth and said so. "We ought to tell the nigger leaders what we're going to do, and then do it, and that'll be separate-but-equal like it's supposed to be," one alderman proposed, and there was a nod of assent. Clifford does not discuss the swimming pool with the Negroes, it tells them about it. This is a partial victory for Bill Hollingsworth, the South's liberal on crutches. If at the meeting, or any other time, he had come out for integration, his authority and prestige would have collapsed; he might have lost his job, and certainly he would have been disregarded. "To accomplish anything here, you've got to work within the existing framework," he told me. "I've worried about this a great deal, whether I'm being fair to my ideals and my congregation, and whether I'm deceiving them. I've

decided I'm not deceiving them. Right now the Negroes aren't ready to mix. What we need is 'separate-but-equal'; to preserve segregation we've got to give them a few more good schools. Time and the new industries will take care of the rest. Meanwhile it's important to keep some sort of feeling alive between the races. It would be awfully easy to split off into two camps and arrive at no solution. But this way it's getting a lot harder to come out in the open against Negro voting. And an educated Negro with a secure job won't be so easily bluffed away at the polls."

**W**ILBURN HAMPTON, who has been a farmer all his life and has acquired a reputation for knowing Negroes, got up after Hollingsworth and said he opposed the idea of the Negro pool. "I know niggers, been around 'em all my life. I know if you've got a nigger working out in your backyard during the summer and it's hot and you ask him if he wants water, why he'll say no. But if you keep asking him, why sooner or later that nigger will decide he's thirsty. It's the same way with this. The best thing to do is just go along and keep quiet, and the niggers won't get too thirsty."

"It's not the old niggers like that we have to worry about," Vansett commented, "it's the young niggers. They're the ones who'll cause trouble. The NAACP is making a play for the young niggers—they don't care about the old ones, but they're teaching the young ones a lot of these radical ideas and holding meetings with them." Someone said it wasn't only the young niggers who might cause trouble, it was the young whites as well. "They're not with us, the army ruined them, sleeping out there with niggers."

Wilburn Hampton, who has friends at the post office, thought he might manage to discover who the NAACP Negroes were. But Hampton and everyone else at that meeting already knew all they would be able to find out for the time being about the local NAACP. Right now the NAACP in Clifford is partly Buchanan Robbins, and partly invisible. Robbins is the enigma. They call



him a "nigger" contemptuously, but in truth they feel no contempt for him. As a doctor whose livelihood depends only on fellow Negroes, Robbins is relatively safe. He has never done anything for which the whites can hurt him, but lets it be known that he might do something. He just talks a lot to the Negroes and tells them that pretty soon they will be able to take over the white school and city hall, "and then one of you will become a nigger Senator from Alabama." At least, this is what they think he says.

But if Buchanan Robbins is an enigma to the white populace of Clifford, he is even more of a mystery to the pragmatic Southern liberal like Bill Hollingsworth who believes that radicals of the Robbins type are causing more harm than good. For Robbins doesn't try to make the Negroes vote-conscious; nor does he bother to teach them that they must prepare themselves for equality. He regards equality as a gift, not as a responsibility. Again, this is supposed to be his attitude.

"Let's forget about Buchanan," Hollingsworth said at this meeting, "he's only one Negro, and nobody pays any attention to him—ask your maid."

"I'd like," Vansett said almost benevolently, "to throw that nigger in the Susquitchie—with a gin fan." The others tittered at the allusion to Emmett Till.

But this is precisely the sort of thing Buchanan Robbins wants Vansett to say; it is an admission that in conflict, if in nothing else, he has achieved status and equality. In any case he is reasonably sure that no one will throw him into the Susquitchie. Educated in Tennessee, Buchanan Robbins returned to his native Alabama eager to help his race. He was appalled by the rate of venereal disease among the Negroes and suggested a campaign of education against it. But Clifford could not accept the idea of Negro leadership and of Negro educators (except in agriculture), and so over the years the town continued to discourage Robbins. The final rebuff came in 1949, when the community was raising money to buy a vacant building for its new industrial development program. Robbins and a few other

Negroes offered to contribute, but they were turned down on the spot. Clifford takes care of all its needy black men, but treats its educated Negroes as though they were no different from the poor and the lame, with the result that those who might have grown into responsible leaders of their people have left or turned their attention elsewhere.

THERE were a few other people at the meeting who suggested that the best solution would be to build a pool for the Negroes. But the mayor, who was planning to run again, knew that it was easy to talk about "separate-but-equal" but not so easy to raise bonds for a school, let alone a pool ("Why don't the niggers build their own pool?" people will say). There were, after all, at least two more schools to build, and Clifford is not a wealthy town.

The mayor had considered all this and decided to duck responsibility for the problem while appearing to assume it. He called on Reid Walles, a lawyer and a faithful member of the state legislature whom everyone recognizes as a "professional" Alabaman.

"What we need here," Walles declared, "is a Citizens Council. The Councils are doing fine work all over the South, particularly Mississippi and the Carolinas." Then he said publicly what Citizens Council members are forbidden to reveal: "The Councils have been damn effective in forming boycotts and other pressures against niggers, nigger-lovers, and a few politicians who don't go along with us [meaning Big Jim Folsom]." Walles barely mentioned the professed goal of the WCC—the dissemination of information to like-thinking white-collar white men. "We want an organization we can rely on in these troubled times. You may not worry about it now, but in five years if your kids are playing and going to school with burr-headed niggers and the niggers are taking over the town and molesting your women, well, don't blame Reid Walles. Do you know what the niggers are doing in Washington? Going to society dances and parties. And I'll tell you what they really want. They want intermarriage, and mixed social groups,



white girls going off to dances with some big black buck and dancing to jungle music with him. And we've got to cut down on their voting too, because otherwise they'll outvote us—the circuit clerk needs all the help he can get in turning away voters. A couple of good friends of mine," he concluded, "are big men in the Councils. Why don't we have them down here to talk to us so we can organize?"

"That sounds pretty good, Reid," the mayor said, "How about it?" And there was a low murmur from the gathering—perhaps it was of people saying no just softly enough to make it sound like yes.

Bill Hollingsworth protested that Councils could do nothing "that we as citizens can't do. We'll just frighten the Negroes and drive them away, and you and I know that no Negro wants to swim in our pool. We'll make things that much easier for Buchanan to poison them."

But it was too late. The WCC came to Clifford, as it did to most neighboring communities. Anyone who wanted to could disagree. The way to disagree was not to join. A professor from a state college appeared in Clifford the following week to lend respectability to the formation of the new Council and to attack the Supreme Court as a corrupt political body doomed to extinction.

But the membership drive was not very successful—only about one hundred men responded. All the young lawyers in Clifford joined except one (who said he favored segregation, but refused to be associated with an extra-legal group). Some merchants joined, some didn't. Hardly a ready-to-wear owner did—because their customers are mostly Negro, and because they know that the boycott may become a two-edged sword. School officials dodged the issue by offering to "cooperate" with the Council, but the ministers, with one rather rabid exception, would have nothing to do with it. A few of the county's largest farmers and a few of the town's wealthy men joined because they have a good deal at stake.

Since there were still some misgivings

about the Council, no one, not even Reid Walles, wanted complete responsibility for it. Consequently a dupe was made chairman—a little-known man who liked the title and could be easily led.

But the failure of the Council to dominate the town is not as encouraging to moderates as might appear. So far the Negroes have taken no official action to implement the Supreme Court decisions; when they do, membership in the Council will climb. For the time being the Council is content. Its word goes virtually unchallenged in public, and is only attacked indirectly in an occasional sermon.

**W**HAT made it easy for the Councils to move into Clifford and the other towns was the fact that the Supreme Court decision found such communities unprepared. No one was willing to take charge, for a leader offering even the most moderate program might be repudiated as the climate became worse. Today, citizens in Clifford and elsewhere refuse to serve on PTA groups and school boards, knowing that only trouble can come of their efforts.

Since its formation, the Clifford Council has met regularly once a month, with speakers drawn from a pool maintained by the state WCC. Among its accomplishments was the spreading of rumors to the effect that two of Clifford's most prosperous Negroes, a chicken farmer and a bricklayer, were members of NAACP. A full-scale boycott never developed, although the amount of business done by the chicken farmer and the bricklayer fell off about 40 per cent. But that was precisely the original purpose of the rumors.

Apart from this, the Council placed two men with the circuit clerk to test the eligibility of voters when an election was held in February for a vacant city council post. Earlier the word had been passed along—for the first time in years—that Negroes would not be welcome and only about nine showed up. I asked the clerk if they voted.

"Well no, we tested them pretty hard on the Constitution," he said. "We suggested



first that they didn't really want to vote this time, but if they insisted, we gave them the usual test and asked a few questions. We asked them who fired first at Lexington, the British or the Americans. If a nigger said British," he grinned, "we told him it was the Americans. If he said Americans, we told him it was the British."

I asked him who did shoot first.

"Hell, I don't know, but it worked. You should have seen those niggers shuffle off."

But the main and most effective weapon of the WCC has been economic pressure. For a militant organization which sees itself as law-abiding and which is fearful of using violence, this is an ideal solution, for it permits aggressive action without disturbing the peace.

"Look," said Nick Roberts of the Yazoo City Citizens Council, explaining why 51 of 53 Negroes who had signed an integration petition withdrew their names, "if a man works for you, and you believe in something, and that man is working against it and undermining it, why you don't want him working for you—of course you don't."

In Yazoo City, in August 1955, the Council members fired signers of the integration petition, or prevailed upon other white employers to get them fired. But the WCC continues to deny that it uses economic force: all the Council did in Yazoo City was to provide information (a full-page ad in the local weekly listing the "offenders"); spontaneous public feeling did the rest.

At the WCC's initial meeting at Indianola, Mississippi, in the summer of 1954, it was decided to isolate and silence white dissenters. The Council organizers knew that the Negroes would need white leadership and help—ministers, editors, school-board members—and it resolved to use social ostracism to deny these to them. In Holmes County, Mississippi, a mass meeting sponsored by the WCC asked Dr. David Minter and Eugene Cox and their families to leave the county. Minter and Cox had been running a cooperative farm for Negroes under the auspices of the Presbyterian church. After the Court decision they were seen as a

danger. The Cox and Minter families, however, had never been very much involved with the community, and so they stayed on—in spite of threats and the cancellation of their fire-insurance policies. Nevertheless, Negroes became afraid to come out to their farm, and the two families found themselves isolated. The neighboring minister, a conservative and one of the two men who had defended them at the mass meeting, was transferred out of his parish. (A South Carolina minister lost his church after co-authoring a resolution which denounced economic sanctions against partisans of integration as un-Christian.)

In another Mississippi city, two doctors were told that their white patients would be denied the use of a new hospital unless they agreed not to bring Negro patients even into the segregated wing. (The Council leaders, who expect the Court eventually to abolish segregation in hospitals, believe that the best policy is to keep Negroes out altogether.) And in Clinton, Tennessee, where mob demonstrations greeted the opening of the school year last month, principal D. J. Brittain received so many threatening and abusive telephone calls that he had to change his number.

**A**MID all this, Southern Jews have felt themselves in an uncomfortable position. The WCC's are not anti-Semitic. Asa Carter's North Alabama Citizens Council is limited to those who believe in the divinity of Jesus, but so far it has been clearly the exception. The Mississippi Councils at one time sent out some anti-Semitic literature, but upon being challenged, Patterson, their leader, quickly apologized. Some of his best Council members, he said, were Jews.

Anti-Semitism is not respectable and the Council movement has more to lose than gain by flirting with it. When, at a rally in Memphis, a speaker remarked that "The NAACP is the worst organization to come along since the one that crucified Christ—and I may as well say it—it's the same organization," the *Commercial Appeal*, a rather conservative paper, attacked the meet-



ing for its anti-Semitic overtones, and the next day the head of the Council issued a lengthy apology. But under different circumstances the Councils could easily become a rallying ground for hatred of all minorities.

**F**OR the Southern Jew the real problem has been what to do when asked to join the Councils. Some—a small minority—have joined willingly and enthusiastically out of conviction; a few join and serve in order not to be singled out for attention. But many, many others are faced with an immense moral and economic dilemma. They may try to stall when invited by the Council, but if the Council persists, as it frequently does, the Jew must take his chances.

"I did it with a heaviness I never did anything else with before," a Jew, head of one of the five Jewish families in a town of 12,000, told me. "This is my home and I want to stay here. I gave them my money and now maybe they'll forget about it. I didn't feel I could stay here and not join."

Another Jew, who did not join, scanned the main street of the Delta town where he lived and said: "I lost friends, I'm sure of that, and maybe some business, but I felt I just couldn't do this. I tried to explain to them that while we shared much in this community, the Jewish tradition would make it impossible for me to do this. I think some understood. Others, I guess, won't want to."

Rabbi Perry Nussbaum, of Jackson, Mississippi, summarized the Jew's position: "In the Delta area of our state, where the Jewish merchant is pressured into taking sides, I would be the last to ask him to make a martyr of himself and his family and prepare to move when he is compelled to join a Citizens Council. But I am against Jews joining in larger communities."

Rabbi Nussbaum's statement points to the important fact that the Councils' strength is at maximum in the smaller Deep South communities, and dwindles wherever communities grow larger. The weapons of the Councils are almost completely ineffective in big cities—a fact that bodes ill for the future of the movement, since the South

is becoming more and more urbanized. Moreover, with industrialization, labor unions will probably come to represent a major threat to the Councils. This is recognized by no less a Council member than Judge Tom Brady of Mississippi, author of *Black Monday*, who sent a letter to the Mississippi Manufacturers' Association last year suggesting that the Councils and the MMA team up, "mix in a little demagoguery" and beat unionization with the race issue. The MMA turned him down.

But the political strength of the Councils—even in big cities—does not lie in numbers. While they have been unsuccessful in electing Federal officials (as distinct from state representatives and state senators) of their own, and while rabid pro-segregation candidates (like James D. Johnson of Arkansas who received a bad licking in a recent gubernatorial election) have failed, the Councils have been able to force political aspirants generally into more extreme racist positions.

But above all else, the very existence of the Councils has had the effect of suspending freedom of speech in many areas. This is perhaps their most alarming achievement—to have robbed the South of the open discussion of the torturing problems that it so desperately needs. Before the advent of the Councils a man who spoke up against Jim Crow merely ran the risk of being known as a radical; today he faces an organized network of groups consciously working to remove dissenters—his job and his family's happiness may be at stake.

It has been difficult to criticize the WCC openly, and opponents of the movement have contented themselves with attacking not what the Councils are, but what they might become. "When they first started," Grover Hall, editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, wrote, "we called them manicured Ku Kluxers. But we had to back down. I don't think they are anything like that and I hope they won't become anything like that." Because of its pretension to respectability, the WCC has had to bow to and swallow criticism of acts of violence committed by its adherents. When four members of the North



Alabama Citizens Council assaulted Negro singer Nat (King) Cole in Birmingham they drew maximum penalties, and got little sympathy from editors or private citizens.

**B**UT this fall the Councils, or at least the Asa Carter Council, finally came out into the open. The principal of Clinton High School in Tennessee, D. J. Brittain, was anticipating no trouble at the start of the current school year, even though Negroes—by court order—were entering the school for the first time. "The people are taking this very well, they aren't getting excited or bothered much about it," he said. "Most of our people don't like it, but they know there's nothing else we can do and they're accepting it. The only trouble seems to be threats from outsiders in Middle and West Tennessee."

Because Tennessee is considered a strategic state by Council leaders, the move toward integration at Clinton—the first in a state-supported school—attracted considerable attention from their quarter, and particularly from Asa Carter of Alabama. This was before the rioting broke out and the National Guard came in.

John Kasper, a friend of Asa Carter, a disciple of Ezra Pound, and a resident of Washington, D.C., suddenly arrived in Clinton and announced that he would do everything possible to stop integration. He conducted a house-to-house campaign urging parents to keep their children out of the high school. He suggested picket lines. He spoke in inflammatory language, inciting the people to defiance. Eventually he landed in jail—but only after he had achieved his purpose. (Asa Carter himself visited Clinton to help things along, and the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government did its share.)

But what is significant for the future of the Councils is the split that took place within the white community itself on the issue of the riots. The mob was composed of rural people, youths (many of them teen-agers), and coal miners from an area where unemployment has been frequent. It combined a

spirit of disorder for disorder's sake with some deep-rooted racial prejudice and, finally, in the case of the miners, a sense of complete frustration. A *Life* photographer who was manhandled by the crowd said, "Those people weren't just mad at the Negroes or integration—they were mad at everybody in the world, things have been going badly and they could let off some hate."

This is not typically the spirit of the WCC. The average segregationist, men like Buford Lewallen, son of the mayor of Clinton, who has for so long fought the NAACP in court, opposed the mob. And the auxiliary police, which tried to maintain order until the arrival of the National Guard, included the bulk of the civic luncheon club—a group that serves as the base of the Citizens Council in many towns, including Clinton.

The local editor, H. V. Wells, declared that Clinton had been willing to obey the law: "It was on this basis that the school made plans to open, and proof of the fact that a majority of the people feel that way is evidenced by the fact that there were 803 students present for classes—in spite of the picket line, in spite of all the trouble that had been brought to the community by a man who has no interest in the community, no faith in our government, and no belief in the orderly processes of the law—by his own admission."

There was also a feeling throughout Tennessee—except in the most rabid circles—that the riot had hurt Clinton far more deeply than the admission of twelve Negroes to the school could ever have done. And everyone knew that the mob action had provided ammunition for the WCC's enemies.

This, then, is the problem which the Citizens Councils with their program of "all legal means" must eventually face. The movement will either have to renounce violence altogether or give up its aura of respectability and start really fighting in the open. Right now the Councils are a determined and sincere group; but in the long run they may prove more determined than sincere.